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ABSTRACT

This book treats human language as the manifestation of a faculty of the mind, a mental organ whose nature is determined by human biology, suggesting that its functional properties should be explored just as physiology explores the functional properties of physical organs. The book asserts that linguistics investigates cognition, taking as its object mental representations and processes rather than externally observed grammatical patterns. Such a view has nontraditional consequences for the kinds of argument and analysis that can be offered in understanding the nature of language. The book surveys the nature of the language faculty in its various aspects: the systems of sounds, words, and syntax; the development of language in the child and historically; and what is known about its relation to the brain. It discusses the kinds of work that can be carried out in these areas that will contribute to an understanding of the human language organ. Ten chapters are: (1) "Studying the Human Language Faculty"; (2) "Language as a Mental Organ"; (3) "Syntax"; (4) "Sound Patterns in Language"; (5) "Describing Linguistic Knowledge"; (6) "Phonetics and the 1-Linguistics of Speech"; (7) "Morphology"; (8) "Language Change"; (9) "'Growing' a Language"; and (10) "The Organic Basis of Language." (Contains approximately 220 references.) (SM)

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